

1973

Selection and training of student assistants for the media center

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Selection and training of student assistants for the media center

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Abstract

The new media specialist must make many decisions in the first few weeks on the job. One of the things he must decide is how he is going to select and train student assistants. This paper represents one new media specialist's attempt to investigate the kinds of selection and training procedures practiced in media centers and to apply what is found to her own new center.

SELECTION AND TRAINING OF STUDENT ASSISTANTS
FOR THE MEDIA CENTER

A Research Paper
Presented to the
Faculty of the Library Science Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for 35:289
and
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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July, 1973

Read and approved by

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Date July 24, 1973

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I. Purpose

The new media specialist must make many decisions in the first few weeks on the job. One of the things he must decide is how he is going to select and train student assistants. This paper represents one new media specialist's attempt to investigate the kinds of selection and training procedures practiced in media centers and to apply what is found to her own new center.

There is very little in the literature dealing with student assistants published during the last ten years, either in book or periodical form. Searches of Library Literature, Education Index, CIE and RIE failed to find any references more current than the 1969 Standards. The book material was usually confined to one or two short chapters within a general work and was not very informative. Two media specialists, Mrs. Allaire Hazen and Mrs. Virginia Thomson, were kind enough to give the writer the benefit of their ideas concerning the selection and training of student assistants for the media center.

II. Why student assistants?

Before the media specialist begins to consider selecting and training student assistants, he must decide whether their services will be worth the time and effort that a selection and training procedure will take. He must determine what they can do for the media program. It may be that he will decide to stop then and there ^{small} have no student assistants at all. If he does, he ^{may} will be making a mistake and throw away an opportunity for help.

The student assistant can do many things for the media center. At Peet Junior High School in Cedar Falls, for example, student assistants run the circulation desk, shelve material, process books and read shelves. The media specialist or the clerk would have to do all these things if there were no student assistants. At Jewett Elementary School in Evansdale student assistants provide housekeeping services--watering plants, wiping tables and putting chairs in order. Student assistants can do more.

In some media centers, student assistants operate audiovisual equipment in and out of the center. In others they write book reviews for the school paper. They type letters requesting pamphlet material, clip from newspapers for the vertical file, work on bibliographies, help other students to find material, give book talks, read stories to younger children and more. The possibilities are limited only by the media specialist's imagination.

Not only do student assistants help the media specialist by their participation, the students themselves can benefit. Student assistants are given the chance to develop a sense of responsibility. They can see how much the media specialist and their fellow students depend on them for service and help. Knowing the importance of their work to the school, they can develop pride in their work. Many times the knowledge that they are important can help change a discipline problem into a dependable student. A student who has failed in the class room may be able to succeed in the media center. The media specialist, like all teachers, must provide conditions which allow students to succeed, whether in shelving books or writing book reviews or running the projectors.

Student assistants, in addition to this, should become the students who can best use the center for their own studies. [They, more than any other students, will know what is available, how to find it and how to use what they find. They should be given the opportunity to develop skills in using audiovisual equipment that many other students may only get to see. Also, they often get first crack at any new material to come into the center.]

But, if the students are going to benefit from their participation in the center, the media specialist must do some planning. He must structure their activities so that each student has a wide variety of experiences and still get all the tasks accomplished. It is important that the

shelves are read regularly, but it is more important for the students to develop a sense of involvement in the center through interaction with the media specialist and other students.

III. Why a training program?

Student assistants can only be effective in the media center if they are trained to be. The training program adopted by the media specialist is very important in determining the success of the student assistants program. A slipshod training program is very likely worse than none at all. To be effective the training program must give every student assistant the confidence and knowledge he needs to function successfully in the center. This is going to require time and planning on the part of the media specialist.

The training program should accomplish several objectives. It should make the students aware of the importance of their contribution to the center. It should set the tone for friendly cooperation between students and the media specialist and their fellow student assistants. The training program should assure that students can perform the tasks with a minimum of supervision.

Without some kind of training program, none of these objectives are guaranteed to be accomplished. The time spent in planning and carrying out an effective training program will be considerably less than the time it would to correct errors later. The merits of different kinds of training programs will be discussed in part V.

IV. What kinds of selection policies are there?

There are many ways to select students to serve as student assistants in the media center. Before adopting any of them, the media specialist needs to consider several factors. One factor he needs to consider is the policy of the school administration on extra-curricular activities. Some schools limit the number of activities a student can participate in at one time. In these schools, the media specialist is going to have to compete with other activities for the students' time. Other schools may have policies about grade point requirements. Any kind of policy of the school administration will have to be reflected in the student assistant selection policy adopted.

Grade level can be a factor to consider in setting up a selection policy. For example, Mrs. Allaire Hazen, media specialist at Jewett Elementary School in Evansdale, Iowa, limits participation to students above the third grade simply because students do not possess adequate alphabetizing or reading skills before third grade. Students who can not read can not check to see that cards and titles match when checking in material.¹

The tasks that the media specialist wants students

¹Allaire Hazen, from a phone conversation on July 15, 1973. Permission to quote obtained.

to do in the center should influence the kind of policy he develops. If he only wants students who can type well, his policy will reflect that by making typing ability a requirement. If he feels that only high ability students can perform the tasks he has in mind, his policy will reflect that feeling. If he feels, on the other hand, that low ability students will benefit most from participation, his policy will reflect that belief.

Some media specialists select only honor roll students to serve as student assistants on the assumption that these students, being better academically, will make better assistants. In following this policy, he excludes a large part of the student body that might be willing to serve. High I.Q. and good grades do not necessarily indicate dependability and reliability.

It is unlikely that higher levels of intelligence are required to shelve books, but higher levels of dependability are needed to do it well. Mrs. Hazen states: "I don't really want the 'A' student. Many times I find that the misfits in the class room are my best helpers."² Mrs. Hazen has found, as have many media specialists, that high grades do not always go

²Hazen.

with dependability. She cites as a case in point a fifth grade boy who was unspectacular in the class room, but who worked very well in the media center.³

Many kinds of students can serve as student assistants. Jewel Gardiner writes that student assistants "may include the gifted child, the average child, and the retarded child, for the tasks are many and the knowledge on the part of the children that what they do is an important school service brings personal satisfaction to all."⁴

Recommendations of counselors are sometimes used by the media specialist to help select student assistants. Mrs. Virginia Thomson, media specialist at Peet Junior High School in Cedar Falls, Iowa, receives a list of students who are interested in becoming student assistants from the counselors. The students indicate an interest in becoming student assistants when they sign up for their classes. The counselors make up a list of those students whose schedules permit them to serve as student assistants and then send the list to Mrs. Thomson, who can "veto" students if she feels they will be too much trouble in the center. She says she does not do this often and only if she knows that

³Hazen.

⁴Jewel Gardiner, Administering Library Services in the Elementary School (Chicago: American Library Association, 1954), p. 13.

the student is "dishonest".⁵

Counselors may tend to recommend some students to serve as student assistants in order to get them out of the class room because they have been discipline problems. While some students with behavior problems might respond positively to participation as a student assistant, others will not. The media specialist should feel no compunction about discharging any student he can not handle without neglecting his other duties. If the counselor wishes to place a student in the student assistants program who he feels would benefit from being in the program, but who might create a special problem, he and the media specialist should consult before the student begins to work in the center. The media specialist should reserve the right to refuse any student he feels will be too much for him and the program.

Other media specialists rely on the teachers for recommendations. One problem with relying on the faculty for recommendations is that the teachers may tend to recommend their favorite students or those who they think fit the stereotype of the quiet girl who loves books. They also may recommend a student just to get him out of the class room. In any case, relying on teacher recommendations does not give the media specialist the chance to choose students of varying abilities.

⁵Virginia Thomson, from a phone conversation on July 15, 1973. Permission to quote obtained.

In a very few schools, students become student assistants as part of course work for a class in library skills. This does give the media specialists some power over students in the form of grades, but this minor benefit is far outweighed by the disadvantages. First, the media specialist would have to teach this class, taking time from other duties. The students would take the course once, serve their time and leave. The media specialist can not build up a reserve of trained students to carry over from year to year. He would have to begin again each year or semester. Perhaps it is for these reasons that the 1969 Standards came out against giving academic credit to student assistants: "If a school feels it advisable to provide students with a volunteer service program in the media center, such activities should receive service and not academic credit."⁵

In a few other centers, student assistants are paid for their services. A study in 1963 in Washington, D.C., found that five of the sixty schools surveyed paid student assistants and that these students were selected on the basis of need.⁶ Most media centers

⁶American Association of School Librarians and the Department of Audiovisual Instruction of the National Education Association, Standards for School Media Programs (Chicago: American Library Association, 1968) p. 16.

⁷Sister Mary Lillian, "Should A Library Aide Be Rewarded", Catholic Library World, 63:34 (April. 1963)

have budgets that preclude this kind of arrangement.

The most common procedure is for the media specialist to recruit volunteers from study halls and free periods. These students must be attracted to the program by some kind of recruiting device--posters, advertisements in the school papers or wor-of-mouth. Media specialists in schools with modular scheduling or without free periods are going to have more difficulty in locating the available pool of students than the specialists in a school with regularly scheduled study halls. Often, the atmosphere of the study hall itself will serve as an effective recruiting device.

Some media specialists simply accept the first students who come to the desk and volunteer. This does not guarantee that the first students to the desk will be the best students interested. Some other media specialists may decide that only eleventh graders or only twelfth graders are eligible. The problem with limiting participation to one class is that it prevents the media specialist from developing a group of trained students to carry over from one year to the next.

Another alternative is to have the interested student fill out an application blank. Mrs. Hazen has been using teacher recommendations, but is going to use application blanks in the coming year. She sees several advantages in using the application blank. First, it puts the relationship between the media specialist on a businesslike level. It will also give students ex-

perience in filling out application blanks, something they will need to do in later life. The use of the application blank should give the media specialist enough information about the student to help him come to a decision as to which students to select.⁸

The application blank must be complete enough to give the media specialist the information he needs without being overlong. The usual data (name, grade level, free periods, schedules, special abilities and interests) should all be included. Listing of extra-curricular activities can help the media specialist prevent the over-enthusiastic joiner from overwhelming himself with too much activity. Having students give teachers as references will guide the media specialist to consult with teachers who know the student and his work.

Developing and going through application blanks can be a long process, but the application blank can give the media specialist insights and information about the student. Since using the application blank has so many advantages over simply choosing the first to apply, this is the process that this writer would recommend.

In the next section of the paper, this writer will examine the situation she will find herself in next fall and attempt to come up with a selection policy for her media center.

⁸Hazen.

V. What kind of selection policy for Moravia High?

After looking at all the kinds of policies described in the previous section, the new media specialist must weigh each one in light of his conception of what he wants student assistants to do, what relationship he wants to have with them, and what policy will best fit these ideas and his own situation. That is what I will be doing in this section of the paper.

What do I want student assistants to do? Although both the 1960 and 1969 Standards come out strongly against using student assistants in place of paid clerical help, I will have to do just that. With no clerk and little prospect of one, either I am going to shelve books or my student assistants are. Since there is no clerk, I need students who can operate with a minimum of supervision.

For this reason, I feel that I must limit participation to the upper three grades, even though Moravia is a junior-senior high school. I am assuming, and I think correctly, that junior-high-age students would require more supervision than older students. Since Moravia has a probation system for students with grade points below 2.00 which involves limiting their extracurricular activities, a 2.00 grade average is going to have to be one of the requirements for becoming a student assistant. Other than this restriction, I feel their should be no requirements on grade point for participation in the student assistants program. Some

"C" students can contribute as much to the program as "A" students.

I want to depend on volunteers, not teacher recommendations, for all the reasons discussed in Section IV. Since I do want to have some basis for choice, not just accept the first student to apply, the application blank seems to be the best tool for me. From it, I can learn enough about the student to determine whether he will make a good potential assistant. The use of the application blank should help establish a businesslike relationship between the students and myself. Students in a small town like Moravia may have never had a chance to apply for jobs, so this could be their first contact with the application blank.⁹

I feel that by using the application blank and having minimal academic requirements, I can attract and select from all kinds of students for the program. Academically-talented students may excel in writing book reviews for the school paper and vocationally-oriented students in typing, but that is no reason for the business student to be forever typing. He could turn out to be a good reviewer, while the academically talented student might benefit from a session with the typewriter. I want to make sure that my own prejudices do not interfere with getting the most from every student.

This is the selection philosophy behind the policy I have chosen for next fall. The policy itself follows.

Selection policy for student assistants:

1. Any student in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade who is not on probation due to grade point may apply to become a student assistant.
2. Students wishing to become student assistants will fill out an application blank.
3. Students should apply during the first week of the first semester or the last week of the first semester.
4. Students will be chosen on the basis of the time they are free and attitudes and interest as revealed by the application blank.
5. Students who have experience will be given preference.

VI. What kinds of training programs are there?

After the media specialist has selected the students for the student assistants program, he must begin some kind of training program to prepare students for working in the center. Any training program must take into account the policies of the administration. School policies on before, after and during school meetings can limit the kind of training program selected. If students, or the majority of the students, ride the school bus and are unable to attend meetings before or after school, the media specialist is going to have to select only students who do not ride the school bus or have no before or after school meetings as a part of his training program.

One method of training student assistants is to work with each student individually, beginning when the student first reports for duty. The media specialist must take each student and orient him to the floor plan of the center, the circulation procedures, shelving, etc. The duplication of this process with each student takes up a good deal of professional time. Many media specialists choose this kind of training because they have no opportunity to meet with students as a group.

Mrs. Thomson of Peet Junior High School keeps a notebook of basic lessons for student assistants and checks the list after each group has been taken over a lesson. She hopes to put these lessons on tape next year which would save her time for other things. She

is concerned that having lessons on tape might lack a personal touch, but feels that this would be better than for her to have to duplicate effort with each group of assistants every period.⁹

Mrs. Thomson has no opportunity to meet with students before or after school to use the workshop technique. Mrs. Hazen, on the other hand, meets with her assistants every Tuesday after school to work on skills. One meeting may concentrate on shelving, the next on carding, etc. She says the meetings have been too informal this year, and she plans to continue having the Tuesday meetings, but make them more structured.¹⁰

The advantages of meeting with all the students at one time are chiefly those of economy of the media specialists time and avoiding duplication of effort. These meetings can be conducted in various manners. The media specialist may choose to present the information in programmed form, use visuals, filmstrips, slides or any combination of instructional methods he feels will be most effective with his group of students. (The media specialist should set a good example for the other teachers in the building in the use of media during these

⁹Thomson, Mrs.

¹⁰Hazen, Mrs.

workshops. He can demonstrate to them the effectiveness of what he has been advocating by practicing use of instructional media himself in training his student assistants.)

The student manual is an invaluable tool in training student assistants. It should consist of an outline and an explanation of all the procedures that the student assistant will be asked to do. Every student assistant should have his own copy of the manual to consult while on duty or to take home to look over. The manual should be written with the age level of the student in mind.

All special terms should be defined in the manual. Terms like "realia", "shelf list" and "tracings" should be clearly defined. Diagrams of equipment that students will be expected to operate should be included, along with the directions of how to operate the equipment. The directions should be clearly written and understandable. A floor plan of the media center should be included.

The manual, as a whole, should be frequently updated. Information on new equipment and new procedures should be added to the manual as needed. The following is a partial list of topics that should be included in any student manual:

1. Behavior expected of the student assistant.
2. Scheduling and absence policy.
3. Processing procedures.
4. Shelving and shelf-reading.
5. Mending.
6. Equipment operation.
7. Circulation procedures
8. Keeping daily records.
9. Vertical file clipping.

10. Display and publicity work.
11. Definition of special terms.
12. Self-rating or evaluation device.

Whatever method of training the media specialist adopts, he must gear his instruction to the grade level of the students, following good instructional strategies. He must put in a good deal of time, planning and work if he is to develop a good training program.

VII. What kind of training program for Moravia High?

Moravia is a highly rural school system with at least 50% of the students riding the school bus, so after school meetings are next to impossible. There is, however, an activity period every week when student assistants could meet with me. Since a weekly meeting will hardly be adequate to get everything we need to cover in the first week, I am going to have to do some individual instruction as well.

In the first activity period workshop, we will cover areas that all student assistants need to know-- circulation and shelving. The goal of this workshop will be to assure that each student assistant can file book cards behind the proper date, can differentiate between the differing loan periods for reserve, reference and general material and file accordingly, and can shelve material properly. The student manual should detail these activities for reference by the student.

The individual instruction, necessitated by the paucity of time available for group work, will be done on a one-to-one basis with the student and the media specialist. In the years to come, I hope to develop a better way of handling this, possibly with programming or tapes. In order to prevent duplication of my time and still get things done in the center, each period will have different tasks. Instead of teaching six

groups of students to mend books, I will teach one group which will then have charge of all book mending. The following is a schedule which I am considering, made with this idea in mind:

- 1st period: overdues, reading 000-300 shelves.
- 2nd period: typing letters and bibliographies.
- 3rd period: typing catalog cards and reading 400-500 shelves.
- 4th period: processing and mending books and reading 600-700 shelves.
- 5th period: filing catalog cards and reading 800-900 shelves.
- 6th period: checking to see that all reserve material has been turned in, housekeeping, reading fiction and biography shelves.
- All periods: book reviews, book talks, reading stories to be recorded for the elementary students, shelving, circulation.

After a year of working with this schedule, or even after a month, I will probably find things to change, add or delete. But, for the coming year, I want to try to use it. Eventually, I would want every student to have experience in all facets of the media center. As the year progresses and new audiovisual material is introduced into the center, every student assistant will need to learn to use it and help others to use it. This is something which I can incorporate into the weekly meetings. By the end of the year, when the students are more acquainted with the running of the center, these meetings may become more social in nature. But, in these first months, they will have to be fairly structured if we are to get a good

working relationship developed.

It is important to keep the atmosphere relaxed and friendly, but to make certain that students are aware that they are part of a team with serious work to do. These first meetings will set a tone that will be very difficult to change as the year goes by. I want the students to enjoy the time they spend working in the center, but I also want them to realize that they have responsibilities to me, to the center and to the whole school. If the training procedures do that alone, they will have been successful. I can always re-teach circulation procedures, but I can not re-teach attitudes once they are in place.

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APPENDIX 1

Application blank

_____ name _____ date ____/____/____ class _____

Please circle the activities you plan to participate in this year.

Drama Speech Spanish Club Jounalsim DECA Voc-ag
Football Track Basketball Cheerleading Class officer
Pep Club YMCA YWCA GRA Intramurals
Others _____

Have you ever worked as a student assistant? Yes/NO

Do you have any special interests or abilities that might be of use in the media center. Please list them.

Please put your schedule on the back of this sheet.

Since I am new to Moravia, I do not know many of you very well. Please give me the name of two of your teachers who can tell me about you and your work.

_____ name _____ subject taught _____

_____ name _____ subject taught _____

Thank you for applying. If for some reason, you can not be chosen to be a student assistant this semester, please apply again next semester. Your new schedule may make you eligible for the next semester.

Miss Butler

APPENDIX 2

Student assistant self-rating instrument

How good an assistant am I?

Name _____ Date _____

1. Do I report for duty promptly? _____
2. Do I work faithfully? _____
3. Do I listen to directions? _____
4. Do I serve willingly and cheerfully? _____
5. Do I observe all library regulations? _____
6. Do I complete my assignments and clean up before the end of the period _____
7. Am I neat _____
8. Do I ask for special library privileges? _____
9. Do I volunteer for additional duties? _____
10. Do I make suggestions for improvements in the library? _____
11. Do I try to interest my friends in library materials? _____
12. Do I ask for assistance when I'm not sure of the correct way to perform a duty? _____

Suggestions or comments: _____

from "Handbooks--A Tool For
Training Student Assistants"
by Vernelia Crawford, School
Libraries, May 1959